

September 20, 2015

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RE: Extending Graduation Age to 21 for Special Needs Children

Committee Members,

Thank you for opportunity to share our stories. My name is Kat Patterson. I live in Bozeman with my family. I am the co-chair of the Montana Advocacy Coalition and the proud mother of two children. My older child Evie was diagnosed with autism 5 years ago. At age 3 she could not communicate, lived in her own little world most of the time and whenever we tried pulling her out into our world, severe meltdowns would follow.

She is now 8 years old and just started third grade. Her speech and vocabulary have finally reached the appropriate level for her age. Her favorite subjects are math and science which she is really good at and often surpasses her classmates. She wants to become an astrophysicist when she grows up. Unfortunately despite practicing with her every day after school and throughout the summer, her reading skills are almost 2 years behind her peers and her handwriting is similar to her little brothers' who just started Kindergarten. She is still making progress with both, but not at the same pace as her non-disabled peers and not without significantly more effort on everyone's part.

Evie's situation is not unique; in fact most all children with special needs face similar challenges at school. They are very much capable of learning, but not in the same way as other children. Giving them the opportunity to succeed requires a different approach; one that allows for more time. Two extra years would make a huge difference for these kids. It would give them the opportunity to transition into college, the job market or independence at a more gradual pace that is better suited to their challenges.

With a little extra support, they have the potential to become independent, support themselves and lead fulfilling lives. Don't all of our children deserve that?

Thank you.



Kat Patterson
Bozeman, MT
Montana Advocacy Coalition
"People not Numbers"

"The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer